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Rain

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Clatsop Community College's
Annual Literary Magazine
2000

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Confessions of a Bellydancer

From behind the tiled archway I see the fez-crowned
owner
bow slightly and confirm your reservation.
You follow him past the towering three-tiered fountain
as it sings you a lullaby of Paradise,
you cross the lush ancient carpets
spreading themselves at your feet.
After all these years I still marvel at stiff men
in expensive suits who pay dearly
to be plopped down self-consciously on the floor,
but you eat it up—perched on your red velvet cushion.
You come for the novelty;
Men in fezzes wash your hands with rose-water,
They tenderly spread plush towels on your lap,
like grandfathers tucking you in for the night.
You're used to getting what you want, you want
to be entertained. You seek out the exotic, you order
women
for dessert.
You think you know the type of woman
I am: available—young—childless—seductive
I've heard your musings on my personal life
while I'm dancing, you forget
I have ears.
I have eyes.
I watch you watching me.
You think I'm doing it all for you;
Spinning—undulating—floating by loosely wrapped
in fine silks and glass beads but
my smiling eyes do not belong to you.
I dress like a goddess, I scent myself with flowers,
I do it for me.

I do it for all women
but especially those of us who are afraid
of our own inner and outer beauty.
I'm dancing for love
of the music—of my freedom—of the joy that I be-
come

when I'm dancing.
I'm dancing for love
of the mystery of women through the ages,
of the fusion between spirit and body
(... and for the money).

You think you know me, you want to buy me
drinks.

You whisper my name, ask me to join you for
dinner and breakfast afterwards.

You practice undressing me
with your eyes, thinking you know
what kind of skin I wear
over my feelings.

I'm careful not to be transparent,

I'm professional;

only my joy is left unguarded.

When the night is done, I lounge on a Persian carpet
in the sanctuary of my privacy.

Men have wallpapered my dressing room
with looking glass; it is my glass house.

Even the vanity is made entirely of mirrors—the draw-
ers

are mirrored—the doors—are mirrored; I am weary
of my reflection. I remove my beaded belt full
of sweaty twenty-dollar bills

and scratch the rash they leave around my hips.

I eat—

an entire Moroccan chicken, with my tired jeweled fin-

gers
then I sneak out the back door,
drive far away from the city and leave you.
Leave you with your imagination, as I take off my face
Paint—push-up bra—rhinestone earrings—
I work hard
to hold onto every little piece
of myself.
But sometimes I wonder
as I pull on my overalls, old sweater and
rainboots, trudge out to the barn, in the mud.
Under the midnight stars
I milk my goats
after being glamorous for you all night.
I wonder
as I brush my teeth, dental floss poised—
I gaze into the mirror and see an aging
farm wife staring back at me.
I wonder
the next morning, while I'm homeschooling my kids—
washing the dog—doing dishes
from the night before
—setting my hair—painting my
nails for that night's performance.

How much longer
can I sell my love
of dancing, sell my joy, my passion
to become a stranger's fantasy
some secret
image
you pull out on those long nights
when you're all alone in your bed,

just your hands,

and a memory of

who you think

I am ?

Anusuya Silga

Jazz Kiss

Inspired by Kelley Shannon and the Josh Nelson Group
in concert August, 1999, Pacific Rim Café, Astoria, Oregon.

The singer's bouncing the jazz
in her little black dress with the mike
in her hands behind her back and
she leans it down for higher amp
close to the flapping mouth of the bass.

The lady who watches and listens
in the leftmost chair of the second row
thinks about her soul under her ribs
where she feels the sound.
Her legs are jumping fast, her left foot
slamming flat against the floor
in white leather mules.

Oo dee ood loid doid, in the mike
they're pullin' it fresh outta the dark,
the way it always works for jazz,
fast as fingers go on keys
and deep as drums roll
into your chest, they hit
a new discordant chord,
held in a long drag
beyond expectation
and steel whisks on the skin.

The jazz, the lady tells herself,
is hitting her soul, though it seeps
into tissue more touchable than soul is
in her porous limbs and trunk
and in the cabernet sound
from the singer's lips, brushing
red and oh'd on the mike,
oy oy oy oy oo ed oo,

the lady in the chair scoops out
with her left bare hot summer arm
rounded in a dancer's open pose
and as the music is rising and
sliding around them, her restless hip
leans into an irresistible roll to land
her up on the lap of the profiled man
who sits in his trance to her right,
and he takes the pressure
as grape goes to wine.

As his fingers play her
vertebrae with the jazz band,
she whispers smiling at his ear,
trails liquids and diphthongs
with her tongue almost
on his ear lobe there, and
then, as the bass sax lifts
its deepest howl high
to the lights and the air
at the top of the room,
her lips do it to his, do

a big steam kiss to the soul
that they both know where to find,

their breath stopping there
in the exquisite air
the way the player delays the chord,
and they drop into place on his lap
with soft sticks on cymbals

and back she rolls smoothly
to her seat, back into the beat
with her foot, as if
she hadn't done it, as if
it hadn't been done at all,
and no one had seen
a thing

and they listen to the jazz,
relentless hands pushing keys
into cognac around them,
they listen to the jazz
waiting for the last note
to go home,
bobo bababa bobaba yo,
dadoy dadoy dadoy dadoy,

and except for her hand
laid in between them now
by his thigh, and he lets her,
they sit side by side there
as if they didn't know
each other a whit,
as if they hadn't just damn kissed.

Florence Sage

Silhouette

An old woman,
eyes dusty from the soil of many seasons,
shifts in slow motion
the eroding sands of her existence.

Golden veins of paraffin
long since shadows of themselves
adorn her hands of faded parchment
her face furrowed from a mosaic
of decades emotions.

I've watched her broken silhouette,
sliding from window to window
in icy testimony to the embrace
of winter's onslaught.

I wonder if it's hard for her,
alone with the crushing noise of silence,
revisiting suitors long since gone,
breathing magic moments
into attic photographs,
washed yellow by
the call of a smoky hourglass.

In the evening when she locks herself away,
does she turn on the radio
and call the ghost to dance,
or lay quietly in her bedroom,
waiting for the one visitor
she knows she can expect.

Imara A. Jabari

Her

The grandmother clock
sits on our mantle
like a wise sphinx

the cats come down
and sit in the
livingroom chairs
to hear her chime

Susan Firghil Park

On International Business

She fell in love not just with a city,
but with the idea of cities, as she wandered
foreign streets alone and happy, nothing to do
but stroll and stare after business meetings ended.
She sat at cafes, drank wine, wandered museums,
regarded the river flowing inevitably.

Though she still turned heads
walking down the street, this too would pass. Not
caring,
she knew she lusted after great cities, their topography
and vastness. She wanted skyscrapers, subways, hotels,
slums, zigzag of exterior fire escapes seen from a subway
hurtling, tunnel to tunnel, glass elevators rocketing
upward
over hotel lobbies.

Alone, she entered
restaurants across Europe, found the caressing eyes
of Dutch waiters and German train conductors' voices
lovely but they did not induce the rapture
she was looking for. It came from subway maps
written in Cyrillic, barges floating down rivers
past basilicas, going in and out of train stations,
airports, metros, taxis, her passport stamped
again and again, until she became someone else.

Karen Braucher

Lifting Off

Sucked into a box, the mind is a dying river.
Fields of gray cubicles don't wake up.
Multifunctional MBA's like me zip by,
whisking cell phones, portable PCs.
I move down the conveyor belt,
eat food on plastic trays like the others.

How did I come
to this terrible landscape—
windowless, thrumming,
all rectangles and no curves?
I try to move with the others.
I am a twisted thing,
afraid of death yet dead.

There is a broken-winged force with a beak.
Part-woman, part-man, and predatory,
Will an animal fire enter me
so this broken-winged
shadow can not scare me?
I hate calendars, clocks,
glib masks over lonely faces,
tubes and metal enclosures.

I will become a hundred shades of green—
leaves, pine needles, lichen and moss,
And the birds, showing black crests
and blue wings, will lift off
into the arc of revelry, zooming.

Karen Braucher

It happened during my New Age phase in San Francisco in the 1980's. I wore a T-shirt that said, "meditation is not what you think," and I had a bumper sticker that read, "your karma ran over my dogma." I put the bumper sticker on my used 1968 Volvo, the first car I ever owned. I bought it from a woman named Sage, a would-be gypsy woman I met one weekend giving tarot card readings on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. The cards said my life lacked movement, and Sage had the solution. Fingers with long purple nails flipped down a card with a chariot on it.

"There's a car in your future."

"How much will it cost?"

Another card, the five of discs. "Five hundred."

"I only have three-fifty."

The purple nails flipped down a third card, this one with a man stepping off a cliff. It read, "the fool."

"They will come down."

Many people argued I had been taken advantage of, seeing as how the front fender was missing and the interior on the passenger-side door was gone (you could see how the handle cranked the window up and down). But for me the car was kind of litmus test, a glass half full or half empty depending on your outlook. Most people called it a bucket of bolts, a rattletrap, a menace to society, though they still accepted rides when I offered them. But when I dropped them off, their feet hit the same ground they'd always hit, and would continue to hit, for the next several years of the rest of their lives. There were a few who saw the car for what it was, a statement, a down and dirty hot tenor riff of Kerouac jazz. And for those I felt a special respect. I knew they

walked through life with their eyes wide open, had a wonder for each moment as it was danced into existence by gods of the most cosmic proportions.

That was how I met Zoe, a match made not in heaven but in the furnaces of hell stoked by little mean men with horns and tails who, on their off hours, sat around a small table perfecting the only vice allowed them—cheating at poker (they were petty, desperate men betting the only thing they had, matchsticks, that on occasion burst into flames, dissipating their meager earnings). I don't know how it is these days, but in San Francisco in the 1980's New Age wannabes made pagan altars on the dashboards of their cars. They covered it with a piece of cloth, dotted it with sacred objects—a little plastic Buddha, beads, hawk feathers, or crystals from Mt. Tamalpais. But not me. Instead, on an impulse I could not explain, I bought little Star Wars toys, a plastic troll with long orange hair, a Christmas tree ornament in the shape of a pickle, a bow tie that would spin when you turned a hidden switch. In my saner moments, during long red lights or stop-and-go traffic on the bridge, I looked at these and realized I would never be a member of the New Age (I knew this with the same certainty I had a decade earlier concluded I would never be a hippie because I hated the taste of wheat germ). But back then I felt pleurably unaccountable to reality. And so sanity, like so many other practical matters, took a back seat.

That's where Zoe fit in. When I first offered her a lift, she said with genuine admiration, "how could I pass up a ride in a limo like this?" Then she saw the dashboard, her eyes lit up, and her hands went to work. She said Princess Leia was actually a drag queen, and R2D2 and C3PO were her consorts. She put Luke Sky-

walker astride the pickle and flew him about, then pitted him against Darth Vader for the affections of the troll, something I allowed given the dubious gender of the troll (it had no clothes or genitals). That day, driving somewhere on Dolores Street, with its green meridian and block after block of statuesque palms, a strange and magical woman entered my life, turned it on its side, and changed it forever.

Zoe worked in an upscale hot tub place in Palo Alto called Making Waves, seeing people to their rooms, bringing towels, herb tea. "It's the closest thing to a Geisha I've ever been," she gushed. The owner was a single woman whose husband, after sleeping with every woman that came in the place, left for Humboldt County to throw pottery and dive for abalone. But Zoe imagined her as a kind of madam, the proprietress of an underwater whorehouse, a kind of aquatic Heidi Fleiss. There were nine rooms with various combinations of tubs, saunas, cold plunges, massage and facial treatments, and each had a motif, code words, Zoe said, for the specific sorts of debauchery conducted behind those closed doors. "Screams of pleasure..." she paused and her eyebrows moved up slightly, "or pain?"

"For some people it's the same thing," I added, just trying to keep up my end of the conversation.

Zoe had been keeping notes in a journal about the kinds of characters that went in and out. With my encouragement, she embellished her fantasies into short stories. At first they were torrid little episodes of intrigue capped with corny titles like "Life in the Underwater Underworld," "Hot Bodies in the Cold Plunge Tonight," and "How I worked as an Underwater Prostitute Without Getting My Fingers Wrinkled." But her writing quickly matured and something remarkable be-

gan to happen. I still remember the moment I realized this. We had finished a meal at the Happy Duck Chinese restaurant on Clement Street. She was reading a story she'd written about two lovers, and described their passion as "a screaming smear of neon reflected in the rainy streets of New Orleans during Mardi Gras." The piece was printed in the Haight Ashbury Literary Journal later that Spring. We celebrated by driving to the top of Twin Peaks in San Francisco and gorging ourselves on the city lights. It was her first time there, and she was amazed. "It's as if a clear night sky has fallen to earth, every light a star." She said that when Nietzsche met Lou Salome he said, "from which stars have we been brought together here?" You can see how the Volvo paid off. These were dividends of a grand proportion which could never be measured in material terms. After all, what price can be placed on the beauty of an imagination emerging, cresting and breaking like a Caribbean wave into the frothy here-and-now that washes warmly about our feet?

Zoe had a nose for sunsets too. One time we came out of Green Apple Books, where she was always in the Eastern philosophy section, and she suddenly saw the lowering sun painting a flaming pink over the white-stuccoed shops and houses. Following her impulse, Zoe, me and the Volvo ended up at the fishing pier between Ft. Mason and Fisherman's Wharf. The sun set through the Golden Gate Bridge turning the water undefinable shades of blue and purple, maybe the way the colors of a Gauguin painting would look to someone on LSD. In those moments, time moved away from me as if a tide taken away by the moon, and I stood in timeless wonder at the fate which brought me to this place, at this precise ineffable moment, to appreciate it with a

new depth through the eyes of this woman.

Another time Zoe took me to the San Francisco marina. It was a fine sunny Saturday morning, and I could feel my youthful hope and promise blowing with the wind in through the Golden Gate. We walked out to the end of the jetty where a strange collection of pipes curved and jutted up from the surf. A plaque nearby called it the Wave Organ and encouraged us to put our ears to the ends of the pipes. We did, and could hear the slurping and gurgling of the Bay as it lapped the shore. Zoe moved from pipe to pipe, fascinated. "This could easily be the plumbing of an ancient civilization. For all we know, we could be listening to toilets flushing on the lost continent of Atlantis."

From the beginning our relationship was more than platonic, it danced and sizzled like drops of water on a hot grill. This became clear to me early on. After a picnic at Land's End I went home to find a poem in my pocket written in her own hand:

Let's go away somewhere
to a cabin heated by a fire
that burns us raw,
where we can make love
until we grow horns and tails.

We first made love (my idea) in the back seat of the Volvo (her idea) one night in the hills above Palo Alto. The lights of the South Bay were smeared together by the steamy windows of the car. But it was our second time together that looms largest in my memory. Her boss offered Zoe the use of a small cabin in the hills of La Honda, that town made famous by Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. True to her poem, it was a tiny

place with barely a fireplace and a bed, but the shadows of our passions danced like demons on the walls. In the aftermath, I could hear dogs howling in the night—ghosts, I thought, of Kesey and his Pranksters dancing wildly around a fire, flames casting shadows on the day-glo bus, Neal Cassidy at the wheel.

“Now,” she said, “you will be my Scheherazade. Tell me a story to keep me awake or I will have you beheaded. Bewitch me, and your life will be spared.”

I thought hard and began my story. “There was a kingdom with no queen. The king’s heart grew ill and all the doctors in the kingdom could not cure him. But one doctor said there might be a cure—a bird that sings so beautifully that flowers fall from its beak. Were the king to hear this bird and place the flower on his heart he might be cured. So the king’s sons set out on the journey to find the bird...” Hearing a gentle snore from Zoe, I feared the worst. My story had already failed the test. There could be trouble in the morning.

The time I spent with Zoe was like no other before or after. Simple things were made enormous. There was Christmas window shopping in Union Square, the one-eyed opera singer trying to raise airfare to Italy, and the vendor selling plastic severed hands with fingers, moved by an unseen battery, that twitched and quivered on the sidewalk. There was the trip to Good Vibrations, a store in the Mission District that sold sensual aids. We saw young lesbians fitting themselves with harnesses, throwing us defiant stares, and we left with a plastic vibrator so cheap even the directions berated us for buying it. There was Dr. Divine’s Magic Supplies and Novelty Shop (where I’d bought the twirling bow tie). We came away with a small whistle that sounded like a siren when you blew into it, which I

came to regret when Zoe used it like an alarm clock to wake me up.

I guess something inside me knew it wouldn't last. A fire burning so brightly will often quickly burn itself out. Even when our eyes first met and a lock slid shut bolting our hearts, there was a voice inside me that said, "whatever happens, admit right now that it might not last." She left on a beautiful autumn morning that was crystalline and silent and howling the quiet fury of flaming leaves. She left with all her worldly possessions loaded in a single car (yes, it was my Volvo, which I gave her only because she valued it more than anyone else, including me).

I heard years later she became a successful writer, published several short stories and a novel. I read the novel. It was about a woman who goes to Peru as a street musician, and meets an old man somewhere in the Andes who initiates her into the ancient and secret prophecies of the Incas.

As for me, I eventually settled down, became the editor of a small alternative weekly in Eugene, Oregon (the last issue was on debunking the New Age, if you can believe that). I married a beautiful woman with red hair and had a baby girl named Sal. And though I have never been happier, there are still times when I remember Zoe. Life was lighter than air then and I walked two or three feet off the ground like a starchild across the night sky.

Vic Campbell

Underneath the Cherry Tree

Underneath the cherry tree on the banks of infinity
my head in your lap, gazing into the duet stars of your
face

How is it we never before knew such a place
How long have we wandered in search of a spot
A calm place to launder our thoughts
a seizure of time's ever stretching rope
A grasp to a final enduring hope
Here we have found a moment come true
Within the instant of love's pursuit
We have discovered a solid truth
A basis to mason our hearts
A surety that we will never part
By only admittance that we have no power alone
We have divine protection stronger than stone
By surrendering our all to the One
We find that eternity has hardly begun
and with this treasure of gems intangible
We reveal a faith immeasurable
An on going endless ring of life
that is wire shorn of barbed strife
Made smooth and pliable
Yet unbreaking in its bend
All this unearthed in the eyes of you my friend.
Gentle now I sweep back the course of your hair
And lean into the lips of Eden's flare
Where soft fire and flame devour
only the Spirit that gives it power
And in my awe I see the forever
That was promised to the earliest endeavor
The passionate unfolding of the flower
That finds renewal in every hour

a cycle of birth's bless'ed dawn
the recline of death's silent yawn
Gingerly touching your unrippled brow
That can only depict the essence of now
I feel the vibrations of the holograph flesh
that is merely an encasement of visionary mesh
My soul passes into the shell of your body
To fill the cup of the flowing melody
How soft this tender trait
That stands the lengths of eternal fate
the boldness of one that is a linked chain
Which has no weakness and is not vain
Nor a burden of millstone's weight
But as light and feathery as clouds' freight
As iridescent as the lipped day star
That twinkles her light near and far
In the subtle wake of your stare
Where the wind stands still as air
Pardoning a past unbound
Riddled by aches and sounds
Of all agony's wretched tune
Consumed by an unrelenting moon
A sun that is born again with each day
and welcomes every word you say
Oh how it is so in this easiest of wonder
that absorbs my soul with delight and thunder
The dearest of pain's slitting sting
And what joy the zenith brings
From a focal point of hell
Destitution cannot even tell
What unholiness dare not speak
And what damnation hardly thinks
When despair is a blackened sea
That brings its stars surfacing

I can only conceive
A small trifle to believe
In a love of such immensity
That unties the binds of inferiority
Allowing a fluent breath to breathe
In the out of free
Encompassing a starry show
That fills more colors than the rainbow
Hardly is it for me to say
That this pleasure is mine to stay
But for the Creator's bliss it will be
A place designed in fecundity
A downy perception of what might come
a gateway to a new kingdom
This is what beauty is beheld
By your eye where I dwell
Dancing circles of maiden's glee
Once attained in a housing tree
That offered us all our needs
In such a circumference that fits a flea
We found contentment to just be
But in the world's vacuum cell
One can barely stretch to tell
That heart's deepest wishing well
Can always dredge a drink of dew
That is the freshest part of you
And now in your lap I lay
My head to rest and dream away
With you in my vision's map
I find that I ease into nature's mothering nap.

Wendy Blackburn

Bird Watching



Sally Lackaff

Dump Ditty

Handle-less pots and burned out pans
broken brooms and empty cans
plastic jugs and orange crates
stacks of magazines out of date
mildewed mattresses and worn out mats
home for several hundred rats
bundled paper, old garbage rot
bags enclose only God knows what!
Broken bikes and pumpkin shells
discarded toys, dead battery cells.
I sing this song as in my truck I jump
for my monthly trip to the local dump.

Pat Butterworth

Astoria

(With a Sympathetic Nod Toward Tillamook)

It was raining when I left there,
it was pouring when I got back.
The clouds were the same old gray
the mud the same old black.

Summers we run up North
to catch ourselves some fish,
to keep the meat and potatoes
coming on the dish.

Everytime I leave
it's breaking on the bar.
What takes ten days by boat
would take three days by car.

Now, I don't mean to whine
sorry if I complain a lot,
but this slow drizzly rain
is causing my brain to rot!

Yeah, months and months on end
of this slow and dripping mist,
I'm going to lose my mind
if I don't break out of this.

Why, when I reached for my hat
it was just a lump of mold
to wear that wet and slimy coat
you'd have to be real cold.

My boat is turning green

from something growing there.
And be careful where you step at night
you're in the mold king's lair.

The merchants never stock
any of the finer paint,
'cause to get the chance to use it
you'd need the patience of a saint.

I never thought I'd see
a place as wet as here.
Once I saw a guy down town
toggled out in scuba gear.

It's kind of a challenge
and really sort of fun
to try to fix a roof
with a life preserver on.

Don't get me wrong, I've heard it said
the sun does come out sometime
you'll know it's out, 'cause then you'll hear
all those power mowers whine.

Well, yes, I guess I do exaggerate
it won't rain hard enough to drown,
but I have seen ducks swim by
six feet off the ground!

Dave Densmore

Father's Day Wishes

Bring me nuts and wines and cheeses.
Sing me songs of baby Jesus.
Bring me coffee, bring me gouda.
Recite for me bright tales of Buddha.
Bring Sufi poems; read them to me.
Regale me with the words of Rumi.
Bring the picture book of Tao,
The loaf of bread, the wine and thou.
Bring hot water, pour me tea,
Then sit awhile and talk of me.

Alan C. Batchelder

Amuse

Taste the words,
 some poet said,
halcyon and a-zaa-le-ahh—
I add melliflous,
 like a flute
lilting shrill sound
 of the little whales,
bones of vibrant
 toning, fork of
ribs and lolling rolling tongues
that slap and sip
 and slosh sea water
like elephant and rhinoceros,
wonderful words
 filling trunks, trilling
trumpets of ears
 and horns of plenty,
splendiferous as the rhino's
nose, aptly named—
derivation, nomenclature,
so many words an
 open sesame, they mean
what they say—
elucidate, ineluctable, luscious,
 luminous, bulge, divulge
ineffable epilogues of history,
fruits
 of the mouth, pieces
of eight to the bar boogie
 woogie piano
on the numinous
 keys to the kingdom

of notes
played—
 ascending stairs, descending
transcending, like Duchamps nude
 inspire, aspire, respire,
expire, Marilyn Monroe
 renascent—spires of cathedrals
templing thinking fingers that
 steeple under
 the chin—
 to cogitate, reminisce,
ruminate—lugubrious, ecstasy, manatee,
 obvious but arbitrary
 from some primeval birthing place—
a muse.

Anne Splane Phillips

Hairy Possibilities for the New Me

A few years ago, I read about a new pill that was guaranteed to grow hair on follicle-challenged men like myself. But there's one minor catch. It can make you impotent. Since that's like lopping off a toe to cure a hangnail, I considered other options.

Maybe I could wear a hat? Nope. The only hat-wearers I know are cops, the Pope, and bald white guys. Estrogen's old-fashioned, Rogaine's a sissy-boy product, and toupees resemble mushroom caps on your head. Painful transplants give you that Chia-pet look. And joining the Men's Hair Club seemed pointless since I didn't want to hang out with a bunch of chrome-domes.

It looked hopeless. Like my dad and brothers, I was growing more scalp than hair, and my slowly-advancing glacier was knocking down my hair forest. I concluded that eventually I'd have so little hair left that the few remaining strands swept across my head would resemble a seat belt across my scalp. I needed a window of opportunity.

Then the miracle brochure arrived in the mail. A slick, four-color job, it promised the cure I'd been seeking. Real hair—someone else's—skillfully attached to blend in with my remaining strands, would create a "New Me." Impressed by the low-key rhetoric, the photos, and the tastefulness of the brochure, I made an appointment one July day and drove to an upscale office building where knowledgeable, caring experts would eagerly help me achieve my metamorphosis.

It was a well-appointed, top-floor suite filled with pictures of beaming, well coiffured men, some of them my age. But "Steve," who greeted me and delivered the spiel, was 23 at best. (How could this kid help

me?) He flashed an obviously-airbrushed Polaroid snap of himself at age eighteen—totally bald—and bragged that his employer had saved him from certain social ridicule and a jobless future. I was impressed (and amused).

Then I met “Laurie,” another twenty-three-year-old, who took my picture (they call it “imaging”) and asked me to wait while the machine created twenty-four New Me’s.

She called me back into the room and presented a three-minute videotape of hair styles only a mother could love. I now had frosted blond hair, Merv Griffin silver, Tiny Tim locks, auburn, black and brown tints, and a variety of garish sweeps, so bad there was a sort of grandeur about them. The “Ultimate Make-over,” it wasn’t.

I could have any one of them for a mere \$5,000—conveniently spread over five years. They would attach the hair, detach periodically for shampooing, and occasionally replace the real hair—somebody else’s—and nobody would know. Yeah right. This walking glacier, transformed into an aging Fabio, would saunter into a classroom and none of his students would have a clue about the transformation!

Of course, it was a no-sale. I wasn’t a customer or a prospect, but a suspect. A marketing mistake on their part. But I did get to keep the videotape and still have it.

It’s a treasure I share with new marketing classes. I figure that if I show my students this remarkable “marketing tool” and encourage them to howl uproariously at all those “New Me’s,” they’ll take a few chances on occasion and say something daring or intelligent.

The new, risk-free Me, has yet to emerge. But—

lately—I've been wondering about transplanting some of my ear hair. I'm growing a lot of it. Trouble is—it grows straight out, like toothbrush bristles. And I don't need the Don King look, with waxy buildup.

Maybe I should just stop worrying about it? I think it's making me lose more hair.

Robert Brake

The Limit

Ya' oughta see my man
Dig a razor clam
In that space where
Art, science, surf and sand
Intermingle.

Winter solstice moon rises
Through dune grasses,
The brightest one
In seventy years, they say.
It takes over for the red setting sun.

And that man—
Adept at search and seizure,
Passionate in hot pursuit,
Casual in his conquest—
Digs me a *limit* of clams, before
I'm able to spot my first one.

Electric fruit-colors define the horizon,
Dotted with black clam digger silhouettes.
Misty, white sea-spray
The only escape from this rainbow.

I'll enjoy these clams tonight,
And the love that comes later.

Laurie Anderson

The Glass Jar

In the beginning the smell was glorious. Brisk as a dip in a cool stream and salty as caviar on the tip of your tongue, no other smell can compare with the sea. Eventually, it would be the awful smell of rotting sea life that announced the time for another adventure.

The ocean water is where the magic begins. Needed for this fairy spell are only two things—an old mason jar and the bottomless energy of a child. Low tide is the witching hour when the sea spills out all its treasures on the sand and leaves it there in a long caress.

On the shores of Monterey Bay these gifts include a myriad of multi-colored seaweed. Pale green and curly like a plate of slimy shimmery lettuce and auburn straight blades of grass. Long tapered brown bull whips lay in a pile alongside moss green sheets flat and shiny like fruit leather.

My mother was always my companion on these journeys. Our walk would begin at the high tide line and stretch to the end of the beach and sometimes the end of our energy.

The trick of course was to get as many diverse colors and textures as possible. Mother would be as excited as I when we came upon a new seaweed, something perhaps we had never put in our treasure jar. It was such a privilege to have Mom all to myself on these voyages. On these days she was not there for her society friends, or the bohemian artists who slept on our couch, or even for my siblings, whose inexhaustible problems drained Mother like a drunk sucks on a bottle. She was there for me, and the joy of it made me giddy. I would sing songs for her, silly ones from school or camp, keeping every laugh I gave her as a miser would every coin.

When the jar was full or dusk would start to fill the sky, I took the glass to the water's edge and dipped it into the waves to fill it up. This enchanted elixir would preserve our seaweed, floating it within. When we returned home our jar would go in the kitchen window, the best place for the blinding California sun to radiate through and illuminate.

This step was the abracadabra of the magic spell. The sun filtered through the water and the seaweed, making it glow like a stained glass window. The different shapes and shades would swirl in the brine and the colored light would dance on the walls of our kitchen.

So many years have gone by and I am still drawn to the sea, dragging home absurd little treasures to mystify my family. My magic spells are with fabric now, creating quilted dreams with endless color and texture. I often close my eyes for that visual memory of childhood, and oddly enough find that many of my creations have those same colors, thousands of shades of green, purple and burgundy, the gold and chartreuse snippets of textiles stitched together in a sea kelpie's dream.

Leslie Pugmire

Time Travel

Today's trains
 silent
 sleek
hurry through
the homeland
blur names
of small stations
make hasty stops
in large cities:
consider
the emergency brake
to still
the image
of a gently flowing river
a field with poppies
shining slate roofs.
Only the tunnels
long and blind
have saved
the thick smell of soot
from steam locomotives
 dream locomotives
of childhood.

Karin Temple

Christmas

She stands by the noble pine,
lifting a sliver of man made ice
on to the fingers of our evergreen.
It is the Christmas season,
and she is full of warm memories,
conjuring wispy shadows of
apple pies and grandmother's love.
Songs of the season dance from
lips pursed in celebration.

In a corner of the room I struggle
with the boiling ache of disconnection,
watching her enjoy a season
that finds me lost and empty.
A sharp-edged comment leaps from my tongue,
cutting through her joy
like a scream in the night,
shattering the gleam in her eyes,
leaving shards of liquid crystal
falling to the floor.

Her responsive bites
with the force of a winter gale.
She says I am miserable and
most likely always will be,
a wretched soul wrapped in the night
like garbage on a city street.
She didn't understand the rage,
bubbling from my gut like some
black primordial ooze,
the jealousy encased in vitriol
for the joy this season brings to her.

And how could she know the demons
I have known,
the half-breed child of the projects,
lacking gifts, requiring food,
awaiting the arrival of Christmas Eve,
for the two dollar
tree no one else would choose.

I too am full of memories,
of parents and siblings long since gone,
of beatings and songs of ridicule,
of loneliness and other little murders,
venturing like dark sirens from my
coldest recollections,
easing pain under my eyelids
like molten waves of lava.

I had no grandparents softly singing,
no carols by the fire light,
no childhood or family friends,
nor mistletoe or laughing eyes.
And yet, it was wrong for me to kill her rapture,
but tonight I became the little brown boy,
face pressed against a frosty window,
asking God why Santa Claus forgot me,
sobbing in his room to the rhythm
of a dark and silent night.

Imara A. Jabari

He and She and Their Four Kids

He dripped sweat down the front of his white T-shirt as he mowed the yard with a red pushmower, while she edged around the yard with her old garden shears that always made blisters even though she always wore her old green and white striped cotton gloves with dirt caked all over the fingertips, as their four kids took turns on the new blue and red metal swing set with two swings, a slide and a pushglider.

He spent all the next day and raked the cut, pale green grass into orderly piles while she swept the driveway, sidewalk and curbs free of clippings and their four kids took turns carrying the dead grass in small cardboard boxes to her flower garden compost pile behind the house.

* * *

He carefully attached string after string of bubble lights filled with red and green, still liquid to the limbs of the largest Christmas tree he could buy from the tree lot at the end of their street, while she rolled out yards and yards of creamy sugar cookie dough on the yellow and gold speckled Formica kitchen counter as their four kids took turns cutting it into camels, bells, angels, and gingerbread men.

He gently laid, box after box after box after box of silver tinsel, one strand at a time, upon outstretched limbs of the fresh pine while their four kids took turns poking the blazing fire while she carefully opened the faded, divided paper boxes and unwrapped the beautiful, shiny, glass ornaments, a spectrum of colors dancing as "White Christmas" sung by Bing Crosby filled the living room as the record went round and round on the phonograph player in the cor-

ner cabinet.

* * *

He sold a shiny, new, brilliant white 1959 Thunderbird to Dr. and Mrs. Howe from next door while her favorite dark chocolate brown and chrome Packard with lovely brown velvet seats was sold to Mrs. Robert Turner, who lived all alone in the white two story house with the dark gray shutters on Mountain View Drive while their four kids listened to their mother crying behind the bathroom door.

Then Joe and Wanda Applegate and their ten year old retarded son, Andy, from around the corner, walked by early one summer evening, as he was watering the hydrangeas in the front flower bed, and began talking to him about their old '49 Nash and asking him what they could get for it while she came out inviting them in for a piece of fresh baked apple pie and handcranked ice cream while their four children took turns trying to teach Andy how to play "Glow Little Glow Worm," on the new piano in the light pink and creme living room with the matching lamps and end tables.

He began bringing home brand new red convertibles with white vinyl roofs that slid back into the trunk of the car and demonstrated this amazing process in their driveway gathering a large and ever-growing audience of all the neighbors from at least three streets over and up the hill, including Mr. and Mrs. Applegate and their son, Andy, the Lamberts, and even grouchy old Mr. and Mrs. Warren, while she put on fresh rose-colored lipstick, tightened up her French knot and sat in the driver's seat, pushing the little black button located just under the dashboard, over and over again and smiled until her jaws ached and watched their four chil-

dren pass out small white business cards he brought home from the new car dealership he and his brother purchased against her wishes.

He worked throughout the fall and a record cold winter to sell more new Galaxies, Thunderbirds, and Fairlanes than any other salesman in the state and won the contest sponsored by Ford Motor Company for an all-expense paid seven days/six nights first class extravaganza to Puerto Rico in August while she was finally elected president of the Women's Garden Club at the January meeting with the honor of chairing the 42nd Annual Summer Formal Dance planning committee which is always in August while their four kids took turns fixing macaroni and cheese with wieners and emptying the dishwasher while helping each other with their homework at the kitchen table. Their four kids could hear her explaining to him, after they had gone to their own individually decorated in each of their favorite themes and colors, bedrooms, why it was absolutely impossible for her to resign and give up the chance to head up the biggest social event of the year so he could get on an island with a bunch of balding, overweight, middle-aged car salesmen and drink like fish, which they always did anyway, right downtown beginning at lunch time everyday as it was.

He asked their four kids, one Thursday morning in April just before school, to come into the now peach and gold living room with lavender pillows on each end of the floral brocade couch with their family portrait painted in oil from Miller's photography studio downtown, hanging above the white, unused, brick fireplace and sit down for just a minute because he had something very important he needed to say while she stood, in the doorway in the dining room with the Hun-

garian chandelier suspended over the polished cherry wood table and matching chairs, with her arms crossed in front of her camel-colored cashmere sweater set and their four kids took turns holding back the tears as he quietly told them she had firmly requested he have all of his belongings out of their house by the weekend.

* * *

He moved away and lived in a studio apartment without even a balcony and continued to sell Fords and Chevrolets until late one December night in Pendleton, after leaving the bar where all the other salesmen went after work, he drove a brand new red Thunderbird convertible demo with the top down into a bridge while she kept the house and went to work in a department store gift shop while their four kids finished high school.

* * *

Their four kids take turns trimming the grass around his marble headstone and put the clippings into a small cardboard box which they dump over the back fence onto the compost pile at City Cemetery while she sells real estate in Scottsdale, Arizona and is president of the local garden club.

Christy Phillips-Matlock

Tomb to Stone

The cemetery seems alive
This morning, thick white fog
A shroud of solitude
Embalming the living
And dead in silence.
A will-o'-the-wisp
Darting tomb to stone,
Ghostly breath
Of memories, dancing
Into skeletal branches
Of winter-shorn locusts.

Brian F. Harrison

Truth or Consequences

Charred red sands
Blanket the sunburnt landscape
Near the heart of New Mexico
Large chasmic cracks
Peer deep into its solemn soil
As riotous vultures swoop
Down upon another dying prey
And rattling assassins paralyze
Yet another overmatched opponent
Scavengers and hunters fuse
Their talents to ravage their domain
Of sand, rocks, and tumbleweeds
The brooding bird that circles the sky
Patiently waits for a creature to swallow
Its last breath of amiable dust
And then picks its flesh apart like a thief
Feasting for hours on sun-cured meat
The steadfast serpent slithering silently
In search for a stray sunbather to intervene
His prey's carcass with syringic fangs
Spewing caustic serum until the victim
Chokes from the venomous drink
These scavengers and hunters
Bring both truth and consequence
To this land of fire
This land of red sand desert
This life and death struggle upon the Mesa.

Trevor Tolva

Hedon Slope

Simple steps taken. Polishing it smooth.
A sliverless ebony. A chocolate tomb.
Silent sighs again, recognition time.
Fresh faced to slavery like a babe in womb.
I don't earn respect. I take it
Like a back alley orphan pick pocket
Stealing top hat cane pocket watch and eye socket.
Reconstituted Revolution
In every day dream time. Freedom?
Yes, I'll take two cubes. I like 'em sweet
Like a chord of shines.
I'll trade you my eternity for your slow motions.
Green, yellow, red time is the guild you belong to
Once well fed I come hungry to
Eat you.

Mick Taylor

Crow in Rain



Sally Lackaff

Poker

At the local Chinese restaurant my Dad always ordered an appetizer of barbecued pork which he dealt out to us offspring like a hand of cards. This method ensured fair share and eliminated squabbles, at least until we got in the car on the way home, when my sister would take out her portion of pork she had saved. She would slowly eat each piece to torture my brother and me.

We got back at her when our parents went out and left us in our grandma's care. The main event of the evening was poker. The three of us played outside till dusk called us in for cards. We ran through the orchard to the house. My brother and I out-distanced Cookie even though she screamed, "It's dark, wait for me!"

We called back to her, "Willie the Pig Man!" because of her long flowing, almost white hair and pale eyes like that of a deranged character in Buz Sawyer comic strip.

That summer evening Cookie ran right into an apple branch. Blood and tears streamed from her eye. No more "Willie the Pig Man." Our grandma had to page our parents at the Victory Theater. My brother and I awaited our fate while an eye surgeon stitched Cookie into an awesome position forever:

"She will never be able to cry again in that eye, the branch severed her left tear duct."

No punishment for Willie the Pig Man's tormentors happened. The enormity of the injury and the near escape of the eye itself was enough to set my brother and I on the straight and narrow forever, well, at least for a few months.

Ritz crackers made the best poker chips. We were never too tempted to eat our winnings because they usually smelled smokey. Mocky smoked but didn't inhale (she said) which is why she lived to eighty-seven. She always played with a benevolent poker face while we three children grimaced, wiggled, squinted, and oh boy'ed until anyone with half a brain could tell what we had in our hands. At a tender age we learned a flush from a straight, a full house, and that five kings meant something was wrong.

When we matured enough to stop wiggling so much we were allowed to watch while our parents played poker with the Goltzs and the Goltz' priest. We were not religious, but Mr. Goltz was my father's partner at work. It was the custom to invite a priest or several nuns home as sort of a social obligation, as far as I could tell. The nuns never played cards. Poker was a priestly duty.

In this gallery we learned the etiquette and strategy of advanced poker: no extraneous talking, dealer antes first, only losers asked for five new cards in draw, jokers were aces, straights and flushes, bets were limited to the size of the pot, and Mr. Goltz and the Father drank whisky with a beer chaser, a drink they called a "Boiler-something."

We, of course, played poker with our school friends, neighbor kids, unsuspecting children of visitors to our household, and secretly by flashlight at camp in tents where we were supposed to be asleep long after taps.

When an adult took a break from the poker game of the moment, one of us, usually the older children, were allowed to sit in. Eventually we made the starting team. Poker then became a matter of storing

psychological data on who bluffed and who wouldn't, who could be scared out with an aggressive raise, and who not to sit next to because of the tendency to "crane."

Cookie, as the youngest, was the last to participate as a bona fide player. She made up for lost time by making paper crowns for herself that said, "Champ." Vandals, who altered the crowns to read "Chimp" or "Chump" did not discourage her ardor for cards.

The family poker ritual remained the same over the years, the decades, the generations. Mocky died. Mr. Goltz got Hodgkin's and died. Mrs. Goltz married another and moved away. We children married and had children who had children. Our parents went to the big poker game in the sky within three years of each other. In the family, the chips rolled, and the cards were cupped in hands and spread face up on the tables, either to win or lose, but never really losing.

Reba Owen

Belle Starr

One of Granny's yearly crop of kitties, about two months away from the unspoken yearly vanishing of same kitties, Belle Starr has found me. Belle Starr is not interested in any vanishing act. She is a Kitty of lust. She has marched her greasy, messy, smelly self into my house to receive anything I might be able to lend her. Giving with a full heart. Expecting the same pure devotion in return.

I cannot resist the radiance of Belle. Anything wanting to live that fiercely, and without judgment—what choice is there? Sickly kitty finds a home. A safe place with all the trimmings. I invited the Belle into my truck, she took me at my word, and we went to the vet for “the works.” If it makes her feel good, it will be done. Bar no expense, the Belle of this ball has arrived. There was no fear in our Belle—only a parting purr as new arms carted off her slimy assed, crooked jawed, foul breathed beauty. Do you see her? Can you smell her? Can you wrap yourself around the radiance of our Belle?

I am so happy to help Belle Starr choose life. All it takes is money. You can buy health for kitties at the vet. Belle, whose crooked jaw does not meow, sings her “original compositions” out to the world in a fortissimo of I AM. Belle, who has kitty leukemia. Belle, who was in such physical torture, a kindly doctor did not hesitate (or even consult) to alleviate her suffering. Belle Starr, whose life force could not be denied, was denied life.

I can hear fate laughing as he sidewinds down the street, his wallet fatter at my naiveté. Succumbing to the irre-

sistible appeal of earnest fools, Belle's eyes touch mine with the slightest flash, before she leaps to the waiting shoulder and the con moves down the block. I am standing at the chasm of cynicism. I do not know the name or page number of this lesson. All I know as I search the quagmire, unstepping, is that Belle Starr had a "tell" and it told.

Karen Bain

Striped Cat

After the storm has ceased,
Its hissing gray curtain
Passing away to the north,
Bamboo wilts,
Culms bending under the unexpected
Freight of dampness, each leaf dripping
From its tip a single jewel glowing
In the cleansed light.

The bright colors
Have taken flight, leaving
Only green, and a young cat
Jungling through the grove
Dreaming of tiger ways, smoothing
Its lips in memory of a slow wren.

Brian F. Harrison

Gulls at Rest

On the bridge lie gray lumps like so many
dust bunnies blowing about in the wakes of trucks,
plucked and pummeled by the river wind.
From the Astoria Bridge you see wraiths
rising in the morning sun from sandbar humps:
divots from the dredge's work, haunted by fogs
and damsps escaping the river mud, too light to stay
behind.

Every drainhole in this bridge is clogged
with grass, like so many green muffs.
And how the wind howls through, how
the spindrift catches in those stranded turves. All above
the rails the gulls float, sickle-wristed
eyeing the mudflats for stranded clams and fish, playing
the wind. Lighter than the river-wraiths, too light to fall
below.

It is the young gray ones who go down,
missing the practiced flick
of wing that tips a weightless body away from death.
Gray tumps of feather and bone
that may blow away in time, fertilize the drainhole grass,
settle
into mizzling rain and rising wraiths; but will never
blend
into this bridge. Bodies too heavy to live, too light to
fly.

Robert Michael Pyle

Northwest Passage

There was a time
Before remembering
Mountains were made of metaphor
And Images of gods could be seen
Reflected
In the palm
Of a hand.

There was a time
Before belief
Vistas were framed
By totem dreams
Continents saw eye to eye
Sworn to secrecy
Like blood brothers.

There was a time
Before promises
When puma slept in an idol sun
The scent of green
pines in the sand
The world on feral wings
Ravens rising like smoke from the ocean.

And rivers ran
And rain fell.
And in the fire
Of the crucible falls,
Fish swam like manna
So thick That men
Could walk On water.

All of this
Before tides
Turned
And the moon shed omens
Like the skin of a snake
Rustling against the shoulders
Of unmarked graves.

And owl's hollow requiem and
Coyotes caul
Beat against a yellow sky.
Blue faith cast
In a handful of mud.
No ritual,
Only premonition.

All of this
Before lines were drawn
In the sand.
Forests fell like gods;
People drowned in their own conviction.
And the salmon, baptized in blood,
Began to swim upriver.

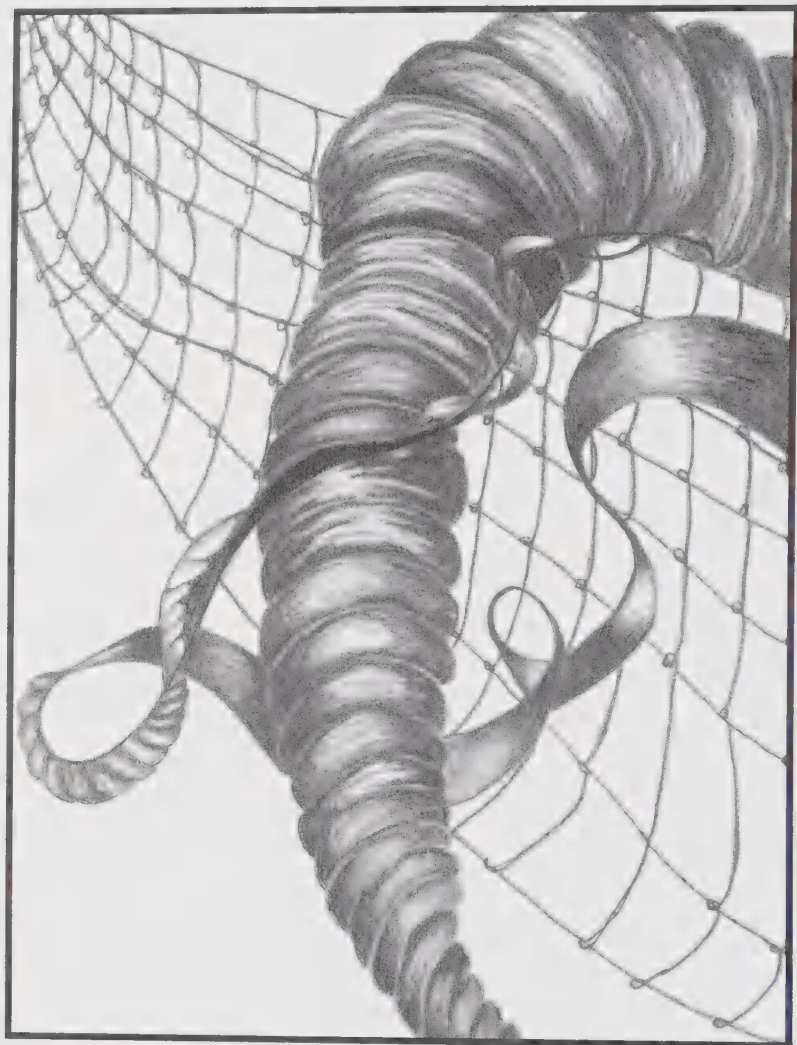
Then old bones washed up on shore,
The broken backs of icons,
The agony of sticks and stones,
Hybris buried, broken hands,
And the mouth of the river
Falling down, like ashes,
Falling.

Now
She Who Watches stands at the bow

Figuring her catch
Not by the girth of a seagoing man
But by the breath
Of a single
Hand.

Laura Lattig

Pacific Strands



Patsy Wubben

Crows at Sunrise

Clear sky swept lightly
with high, white, thin-wisped
ripples of cirrus clouds.
Chimney smoke pools
above the roof tops.
Frost clothes the grass.
The crows come, cawing,
gathering from all directions;
their wings glint in the first light.
They group and wheel together, circle up
on updraft from warming earth
then move east
as sun breaks ridge,
black specks recede
and vanish
into blue.

James Dott

Night Visitor

Alabaster-white cat
With candle-flame eyes
Followed me from the river cabin
Scrambling down
Water-chiseled
Slabs of basalt
River stone stacked like
Children's blocks
All the way to the eddy

Everywhere, riversong
Joining and spilling
Joining and spilling

Settled on a stone perch
Just above the amber sluice
Squeezed my eyes half shut
Let daubs of autumn-orange
White-laced rapids
Five streaking mergansers
With heads like medieval velvet hoods

Let the river
Tease my imagination

A cerulean hole in the sky
Rushed to greet me
Metallic backed ribbons of flume
Charged by
The cat waited patiently
What words of encouragement
Should I impart

*Hey cat, sez I
I might have spent
The night alone
Beside a river
That spills its soul
Like wanderlust*

*But you sneaked inside
Shared a blanket
We're buddies now*

*These are the best of days
Autumn hunkering down
Sodden leaves tilting past
In praise of rain
How are we any different
Joining and spilling
Joining and spilling*

David Campiche

In Utero

Beginning
Infinitely small
First flutter
First life

Genetic keys being played
Coded long ago

Perfect incubation
Fed and nourished
While maternal cadence is near

Growth upon growth
Multiplying, dividing
Future foundations are formed

Buds of extremities burst forth
Rudiments of facial expressions revealed
As the plot of individuality is laid

Brain life
Thought cells
As one becomes two
Unique
Alone
Supreme

Maternal rhythmic cadence continues
Faraway
Yet so near

Fingers and toes

Digital differences
Molded as of clay
As the staff of life
Placenta is complete

Second cadence begins
This time from within

Secrets shared
As butterfly wings rehearse
Fluttering
Quivering
Ground flight

First sight
With nothing to see except
Moist cave
Dark walls

Vigorous
Futile attempts to escape
Repeated again and again

New becomes old
Sheath once smooth now wrinkled
As final touches applied for guest appearance

Walls converge
Rhythmically increasing
As cadence from within increases

First hug of life
Laboring to expel

Rhythm of expulsion
Molding
Shaping
Contracting
Fatiguing

Squeezing and resting
Squeezing and resting

Tunnel once far becomes near
Once dark becomes bright

River of life
Gushes out
Blinding light
No longer alone

Tether of life is severed
First breath is drawn
As cadence within is out
Maternal cadence has a face
The face of love and welcome

Sue Falkner Wood

Columbia River, 1998

In the photo, the small sailboat
skips across the wave tops
slicing the river precisely.

The young man in blue slacks
Embraces the tiller and causes the boat
to heel more, and still more,
gunwale to water, sails perfectly trimmed,
mast angling smartly.

But the life-jacketed woman
holds her swollen belly with one hand
and grasps the jib sheet with
white knuckles. She grits her teeth
and braces her legs.
“Let it off a little,” she spits into
the wind, her words
never reaching the stern.

Nancy Hoffman

Avoid Clichés Like the Plague

As I left our house in January,
a Doberman pinscher plopped
smack on the pavement
beside me.

I was not surprised.
And rightfully so because
He was immediately followed by
a sweet golden cocker
a huge Newfoundland
two well-groomed poodles
and a trio of yowling seal point Siamese.

I dashed to my car,
and a mother cat and her litter of kittens
splatted right on the glass.
(I know it's gruesome, but
we use lots of wiper blades in Astoria.)

Later
glancing out the window at work
we laughed at the tourists on the street
ineptly dodging our town pets.
It's no use really, and
someone ought to tell them.
perhaps we should post a sign
at the city limits:

Leash laws are not in effect,
ten months out of the year.

Nancy Hoffman

Two Crows

Two crows in a one-leaf tree
hunched over and dripping in
the driving rain. Water runs
in rivulets from each down-
ward curve, and drips from
the dogwoods every silver-
gray protuberance.

You can feel the squall line
as it approaches. The leaf
pirouettes in the rising wind;
its silver underbelly sending
a rhythmic warning like the
flashing lights of an on-com-
ing ambulance.

The rain pours from the
sullen sky until the world
seems to be encased in a
fluid shell. The wind howls
and exerts its will on every-
thing in its path, pushing and
tearing voraciously.

Spinning on its weakening
hinge, the leaf begins to
succumb to the ceaseless
pressure of the storm and
its hold on its foundation
becomes tenuous and at
last is severed completely.

As the final badge of life
is launched into inevitable
decay, one crow thrusts itself
into the storm and follows its
driven and ever-downward
path, giving into the mindless
elemental passion.

One crow in a leafless tree...
silent and alone.

James Ricketts

Get in the Boat!

I navigate the slimy sodden logs.
The log raft,
our fresh island of refuge.
Avoiding the holes that can devour body,
it is safer than current and water.
Breathlessly diving for borrowed goods,
lamp and pan are already at bottom.
A risky retrieve of rum bottle ends when
I return it reflecting on fix it's put us in.
"How will we keep warm?" she harasses.

I sit in safety,
far out in the wide channels of the big river.
"Get in the Boat!" she keeps demanding.
I can not leave my gripped security,
will not risk nor drink again.
Let me sit to savor light air contrasting
dark coldness of deep water.
I gasp with knowledge,
boat is secure,
it sits resting above the logs with me.
I climb into its supporting sanctuary,
my shaking belly thrilled at
latest situation.
This time she demands: "Get out of the Boat!"

Our long rowing return,
further imperils life.
Hot tea, warm bath, noodle soup?
Best taste is to be alive.

Barbara Darby

Martha Gets a Boat

It did not look good. Fifteen knots of steady SW breeze, working against the tail of the flood, roiling the waters off the refuge ramp, pushing chop and froth along the channel. But, there stood Martha, looking hopeful, just completed Pygmy Coho on the gravel, in the drizzle and wind. Hi, there, nice to meet you face-to-face, finally. Boat looks nice. What do you think about this weather? Yeah, I believe those folks in the Jocassee and the two Kiwis setting out are in for a surprise when they get around the corner into the wind! Well, give us a chance to get organized, and by then maybe George will have shown up.

Fifteen minutes later, there's George, Solstice on his pickup, grin on his mug, jaws already beginning some ribald joke. OK, we'll get loaded up and see what the weather does. (The wind picks up; the Jocassee and the Kiwis are joined by a canoe, ferrying Scouts and adults back and forth across the channel.) Hell, if they can do it, so can we!

Another half hour passes, and the boats are packed with slippery-wet gear. We shove off, Martha marveling at the stability of her new craft, as we admire her handiwork. Into the breeze, to the edge of the point, grasping pickleweed. OK, let's sit here a while and see. Ten minutes later, I think the wind has dropped. Let's go! Yup, definitely a break. Martha is not so sure, but her boat surges ahead, like a new bird dog.

Half an hour later, we are around High Point, out on the exposed water, and there is so little chop we giggle

and grin at our luck! For once, the weatherman was right—front passed through right on schedule! The Kiwis and Jocassee are pulled up on shore at Pinnacle Rock CG, drying off, pitching tents, as we glide by. Martha in the lead, now, spotting loons and gadwalls.

Sandspit CG is an hour away across a smoothing sea, and abandoned as we slide ashore on cobbles. Clouds are lifting. Nobody here except tons of elk sign—have they been eating beach grass? Tents go up, tarp pops over the decrepit picnic table, and ... the eating begins! Martha stands open-mouthed: Don't you guys ever stop eating? (We notice she has no trouble keeping up.) Time to laze around and listen to her stories of the Harris's hawk – falconing the hedgerows down in the Willamette Valley for voles, mice, and the occasional rabbit. Wind drops to nothing, and the bay empties, bringing gulls and herons to walk the muddy edges, sneaking the odd fingerling or clam or worm into their gullets. More loons in the distance, mournful. A redtail buzzes overhead, and warblers (Martha's specialty) flit in the brush at campside, chashing dying berries and insects.

The Scouts arrive on foot, some five-plus miles of road-walking from their put-ashore point, adults eyeing our beer, and pitch tents just above the high-water mark. George tells them stories of floating away in the night, and we admire their naiveté.

Stir fry, tabouli, pasta salad and cookie (crumbles – victim of intense hatch-packing). Martha: don't you guys ever stop eating? (She is slowing down.) A fire from abandoned 2 X 4's smolders to life, the cord holding the lantern up melts, sending it to the deck, still lit, and

more stories of the hawk follow.

Becky has a rough night, the beginning of what will turn out to be a two-day struggle with sinus pain. We eat fried potatoes and smokies as day creeps over the bluff behind us, and George whumps up more granola than a horse would eat. Slow morning, while Becky sleeps off the pain, and we gather gear quietly. By eleven, the bay is getting full again and all is ready but her tent, so we roll her out into a camp chair onto the gravel, and shake the dew off.

The Scouts head out, walking the shoreline to Smokey Hollow, intending a visit to the Grove of Ancient Cedars enroute back to civilization and a stop at the Astoria Mac Shack, their reward for putting up with the adults for a weekend.

Launching onto lake-calm waters, we head south, reversing yesterday's paddle with a difference; our Folbot double has only one paddler: me. But that's OK, George and Martha are content to dawdle and gab as I punch away at the water. More loons, singing in the distance. Surfbirds on foot-square chunks of rock, peeping as we creep up on them, finally bursting into flight. Around the Point, across the southern end of the island to the ramp, fighting a little head-current. The Kiwis and the Jocassee are loading up as we hit the ramp. Becky drifts in and out of consciousness, and finally rolls out of the boat onto shore, walking to the pickup and assuming a head-back position on the passenger side. A couple in a Nautiraïd slip ashore nearby—and tell of their sweet night amidst a herd of grazing elk on the east side of the island. I admire the 10-year-old boat, wooden longerons

and wooden frames holding the hull out.

Martha's boat still looks gorgeous, and none the worse for the wear. She thinks she will build another, maybe a stripper this time. She can't figure out how to fill her spare time unless she has a project. I'd say she should deepen her relationship with this boat, and not flit off to a new one. We make plans to go watch the hawk hunt in a couple weeks, hoping to get in some paddling on Tahkenitch Lake.

Yeah, Martha got a boat. We notice she pats it a little after loading it on top of the pickup, to return to Waldport. The boat wags its stern with affection. We think she will keep it.

Dave Kruger

Today's Mail

It is addressed to Bessie J. Bain. That would be Lady Bessie Abeula Wynetta Price Bain, Something, Bain, Something Else, Bain, (I think one more something), Bain. Nana, to me. Nana, muse, truthspeaker, kick-you-under-the-table card playing, hard assed, tell it like it is but love you anyway, Nana. Nana of the real silk nightgown for sleep overs, curl your hair when your sister calls you ugly, water the earth with tears of laughter, died three years ago, Nana.

In today's mail, she has received the OFFICIAL ENTRY for the Final Stage.

For three years, the optimistic folks at the sweepstakes company have insisted Lady Bessie is alive. We've tried to tell them but denial runs deep for some. Dogging her son through his retirement, those URGENT missives have finally landed on me, her legacy carrying kick-her-back-under-the-table (old bones and all) granddaughter. A letter. Sanctified by the US Postal Service. Offering a future with Nana in it. I catch the scent of her breath as her arthritic laughing hand snatches for the envelope—only to pass right through it. A perfectly executed slight of hand. The con is only a papercut on the scale of human degradation, but it hits its mark.

"You, Bessie J. Bain, are about to enter the Final Stage."

(Oh, Nana. You're not leaving my soul, my paintbrush, my dreams, my father—your work done?)

My Dad and I aren't buying any magazines.

But we are wondering if you have to be present to win.

Karen Bain

Growing Pains

Darkness grabs my soul sometimes and
strangles the sustenance out of my smile
so the corners of my mouth can't go up
as high as everyone wants them to
and the light in my eyes malfunctions
like a broken dimmer switch stuck on low.

I sit there inside myself, stunned and
wondering if this is really me
or was that other me the one I am?
And inaction sets in.
And apathy swells and overflows.
And finally I'm back far enough to have quiet
and I can think.

I think I shouldn't stay here long because
time slows and I labor in the sticky void
and inside it's been days
but the world has visited years.
And now I don't fit here anymore.
It's too tight and stillness threatens to suffocate.
Caged and frantic I bolt, looking for nothing but out.

Prying the stifling fingers off and out of me
scrambling for air, panicked I'll get stuck in the black
I am forced to let go, to release my grip on that
layer I thought was protective and it slips from me,
peels away like a shedding of skin
and I leave behind that layer of myself I now realize
I must have outgrown.

Veronica Russell

Down the Hall

Down the hall
through the smell
of sickness
I grab a fistful
of Grandma's dress
for comfort
looking up from
the pastel splashed tile
to follow the rhythm
of the nurse's steps
watching the fluorescent lights
afflict everyone we pass
darkening the circles
under their eyes
and stealing the luster
from their cheeks
opening the door slowly
to avoid the onslaught
of silence
I see her lying there
and through the maze
of tubes and machines
I find my mother's face
her eyes never open
and I never understand

Suzan Chamberlain

Except to Herself

Why was everything so damn white here? The walls were white, the curtains were white, the sheets on the bed were the whitest she had ever seen. It was unbelievable. How could she be so dirty and unclean herself and have everything around her be so sanitary? It was as if they were trying to tell her that it was OK to be clean. Be she knew it wasn't. She knew she never had been. She knew she never would be.

She looked at herself in the mirror. Freshly showered, she had scrubbed and scrubbed at her face and arms and torso and legs, because she wanted to blend in. If she could make her skin clean, at least, she might be as white as her surroundings and be able to move her angular, bony body down the halls and not have anyone notice her, because she would just be part of the whiteness. Slowly, she lifted her hands to her face to brush back strands of wet hair. She paused, staring at her wrists. She couldn't actually see the flesh because both were bandaged, bound, secure. The bandages were white, of course. Everything here was so damn white.

She looked about her, at this room which would be hers for at least two weeks, or so they told her. The single bed with its gleaming, squeaky-clean metal frame. The hardback, sterile chair, prim and pristine, ready for any visitors who would come to see her. There would be none. She had not had any the last time she had been here, and she didn't expect any this time. She could scrub and scrub and scrub all she wanted, and she could get her skin as clean as possible, but what she had done to herself shouted UNclean UNclean, UNNN! clean.

The dresser had been recently polished, she could tell, with an unpleasant, lime-scented cleanser. When she was here before, the dresser had been brown, she remembered, a maple or caramel color. Now it was white. Pure-as-snow white.

She would have to go out soon. She knew that if she didn't emerge from her room, they would first try to encourage her to come out, and then the "encouragement" would turn to scolding and then the scolding to threats. Or worse, they would send the Doctor in to see her, the Doctor in his white, unfeeling coat, and she didn't think she could handle even one more inch of whiteness in this room. So she looked in the mirror and carefully applied her orange lipstick, and went out.

This won't be so hard, she told herself. Not hard at all. Just blend in. Just blend in. The robe they had given her, because she did not have one of her own was, thankfully, white. It would help her to just blend in.

They all smiled at her, as though a Star had just lit up their lives, as though a Star had just walked in the room. *They – the staff* – the nurses and maids and cooks. The rest just shuffled past her and some looked at her quizzically, almost as if they recognized her from somewhere. They didn't recall, apparently, that they had just seen her yesterday, when she was checked in. And then she realized: she hadn't been wearing the lipstick yesterday. This was new to them, the lipstick. The lipstick was new to them, and so she was new to them.

The staff smiled, though, just as they had yesterday. As they had the last time she was here. As, she suspected, they had been trained to do. It's difficult, the staff had probably been told, for some of these patients

to come out in the first few days. Always encourage them. Always support them with a smile. But God, how she hated their smiles, with their white, shiny teeth. Like tiny beacons in this hated hallway. Reminders that because of what she had done to herself, because of the rivulets she had released, she was not GOOD. She was UNNNclean. And yet she found herself nodding at each one she passed. She was afraid of what they might write about her in her file if she didn't smile at them. She'd managed to catch a glimpse of her file before and she still remembered the words "surly" and "unresponsive" and "separatist." And the words she resented the most: "Always acting." Well, of course she was always acting. They knew she was a professional actress. Always acting – for God's sake! She felt certain that was why they had made her stay the extra week. She didn't want to stay the extra week this time. She wanted to get out and get home and rip off the stupid white bandages. So she stumbled down the hallway, her own smile reflecting their phony ones, her orange lips frozen in their silly upward swirl.

She made it to the lounge and surveyed the people there. The same as yesterday: a woman in a ratty pink housecoat and with an unsharpened pencil sticking out from her gray, snarled hair; the bald man wearing the torn blue and white flannel shirt and green sweatpants. He was sweating, as though he had just run up a flight of stairs, but she knew that couldn't be true. No one here got to go to another floor. What was on the other floors, she wondered. Were they as clean and white and hard as this one?

And the others –

the man with the striking blonde hair, who wrapped himself in his Disney blanket and sat moaning

in the gray, overstuffed chair in the corner;

the baby – she called her the baby because she couldn't have been more than 18, could she? – who sat cross-legged on the floor and plucked at a scab on her knee;

the distinguished elderly gentleman, spiffy in his bow tie and svelte top hat;

the obese woman in the splendid pineapple parka who simply sat and observed, and occasionally grinned, as though she had just been struck with an amazing insight.

And she thought, I don't belong here. *I don't belong* with these people.

Well, that was enough. She had done her part, she had come out of her room, she had walked down to the lounge, she had made a public appearance, now she could go back to her room and look at herself in the mirror again and remind herself of how unclean she was and always would be. So back down the hallways she crept, determined to blend in, to be as pale and white and bland as her surroundings. But there they were, smiling at her again. Didn't they remember that they had just smiled at her as she made the trek in the opposite direction a few minutes ago? Why were they smiling at her *again*? Their smiles made her want to cry, but she would never let anyone see her weep. So she just nodded to each forced grin with one of her own. She didn't want an extra week this time. She wanted to go home and get the job done.

She noticed as she walked, that the walls were not just white, the walls were glistening. They shimmered with cleanness. Did they have a person who came in and scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed the walls while they all slept at night? Was that someone's

main duty, to just rub and rub and rub these white walls with a white cloth so that when everyone came out in the morning, they would see only gleaming spectacular walls as a background to the staff's sparkling smiles? Did someone get paid minimum wage just to do that for eight hours every night?

She touched the tube of lipstick in the pocket of her robe and suddenly had an idea. Before going to bed tonight, she would take out her lipstick and, so surreptitiously no one would notice, so subtle and so quick, she would make a slight mark on the wall. It would be barely perceptible; a slight brush of orange on white. And then, in the morning, she would examine the wall to find out if anyone had washed her mark away.

She was so excited that night that she scarcely slept at all. And in the morning, she went out and the mark was gone. Vanished. Someone had! Someone had come in and scrubbed the walls all night long! *Astonishing!*

She did it again that night, and the next, and the next, and every morning her lipsticked smudge had been removed. She no longer stayed awake all night wondering if it would happen, because she took it for granted that the orange mark would be gone. And it always was.

At the beginning of her second week there, she came out of her room for breakfast and saw, for the first time, how bright the lights in the hallway were. They were blinding, almost incandescent, glowing – to some people, she realized, intimidating. But not to her. Each one was like a lantern, guiding her to her destination. She ate heartily, for the first time. Why, she loved these lights! Why hadn't she seen before how glorious they

made everything appear? "Doctor," she said during her session that morning, "I really love the lights here!"

"You do? Why's that?"

"Well, they just make me feel alive. Almost... almost like I'm on stage again!"

"On stage?"

"Yes. Oh I guess I haven't told you about that. I guess I'm a little shy about telling of my Broadway experiences..."

But then she went on to tell him about the various roles she had played. Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; the title role in *Hello, Dolly!*

"I did it after Carol Channing, of course. I wouldn't want anyone to think that I originated the role!" She laughed nervously and in a second's passing grew serious. "When do I get to go home, Doctor? I really don't think I belong here."

Following lunch that day, she discovered her wrists. She had almost forgotten about them, wrapped and hidden, two ugly reminders of the job she had not yet completed. But a Doctor had taken the bandages away that morning, and now she stared at the jagged, purplish lines before her. It was summer, and she didn't want to wear long sleeves, but she also didn't want people to stare at her wrists. What could she do? What could she do? And then it hit her suddenly: the lipstick! She took the tube from her pocket and carefully, methodically, covered the twists on her wrists with the orange paste. Now no one could look at her and declare her unclean. That's what she could do. Ha!

She still made an orange lipstick mark on the wall every night before going to bed; it was always gone

the next morning.

Most of the people who had been there when she arrived were now gone. The blonde moaning man was replaced by a wild-eyed woman who claimed Joan of Arc was her mother. The baby was sent home and replaced by another baby whose marked wrists were similar to her own. The distinguished older gentleman was now an elegant elderly woman with crookedly rouged cheeks and vacant eyes. The obese woman in the pineapple parka was still there. She kept grinning.

Why am I still here? she wondered, and she asked the Doctor that on the first day of her third week. "I was told two weeks," she said gently.

"We feel it's best to let you stay a while longer."

"But why?" she said impatiently. "I haven't been surly. I haven't been unresponsive."

"No..."

She leaned forward. "Then why? It's not as if I'm a danger to anyone."

"No, not to others, no. We just think... that this is for the best. For now."

At first she flung herself back into the chair and refused to respond. Then she shouted "Fine! OK! Fine!:" Then she grew instantly rigid, because she knew she had sounded surly. She prayed she had not sounded like any other adjective from her previous file.

She contemplated ways to get the job done while she was still in here. If they weren't going to let her go right away, maybe she'd have to show them that they couldn't stop her. But they were always watching her. They smiled, sure, but their eyes didn't dance like their white teeth said they should. Their eyes were still,

and accusing. Her head throbbed: get *the job* done, get the job done, get the job *done*. She'd have to be released to accomplish that. And the only way was to convince the Doctors what she already knew to be true—that she didn't belong here. Don't you see, she'd tell the Doctor, I don't belong here with all the others. They're bit players and I'm a Star. They'll be in the background forever. *I'm ready for my close up!* Don't you see, Doctor? That's what she'd tell him.

Each night, she now made two marks on the walls, one near her room, one near the kitchen. Each morning, they had been removed. Each morning, she carefully covered her scars with the orange. Each night, she removed it and went to sleep.

"Scarlett," she told her Doctor. "That's the ultimate role. Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*. If it was a play, of course. Nobody told *her* what to do. Nobody told *her* that she had to stay and couldn't leave! Nobody told *her* that she couldn't go home and get the job done."

"What does that mean, get the job done?"

Her eyes grew wide with panic. They couldn't suspect or they wouldn't let her leave! "Just well...the play. Memorizing the lines, doing the performances, getting the job *done*. You know what I mean."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "I think I do."

Oh God! She thought as she laid in her bed. *Why did I say that? I'm never going to get out of here at this rate!* She felt like weeping but did not. She was afraid someone might walk in on her and under no circumstances would she let anyone see her weep.

“Doctor, I really don’t think that I belong here.”

“Yes, you’ve told me that before. Why do you think that?”

“Well, I mean, look at everyone else. They’re somewhat...eccentric...wouldn’t you say? I had a bad episode, I did a bad thing. But I’m so much better now. Really. Besides, they’re going to do a revival of *My Fair Lady* on Broadway next year. I think I’d really have a chance for the Eliza Dolittle role. But I can’t do that if I’m in here, can I?”

“Mmm, no you can’t.”

“There you have it. Doctor, I *really* don’t think that I belong in here.”

The people keep changing. Now a young man with a strangely-clipped goatee. Now a different young man who mutters, “People, People” over and over. Now a middle-aged society matron who insists she is going to the opera that night. There have been at least two dozen cast changes while she’s been here. She feels like an aging diva. Time to move on, to perform again, but they are keeping her here for some reason. She sighs, puts the *Modern Woman* magazine down on the table. On her way to bed, she makes three marks on the wall with her orange lipstick. In the morning, she awakens to find them washed away. She takes comfort in this constant in her life.

They let the patients snack at night, if they want. Chips, or an apple. Whatever’s available. She is eating the second half of an English muffin, but she is hidden in a corner and the experienced nurse doesn’t see her as she talks to the new one, who is there for her

first night.

"They're all harmless really. On night shift right now, the only one you have to watch at all is Jennifer, and she's harmless too, except to herself. If you call her Jennifer, she won't respond. She likes to pretend she's been some Broadway actress, and so you need to call her by some name of some character. She always tells you, so don't worry about it. And she has this bizarre ritual of making marks on the wall with this garish orange lipstick and then coming out later and scrubbing until the marks have disappeared. We just let her do it. It seems to make her happy, so what's the harm? She makes the marks, she wipes the marks away. But the important thing that the administrators want *you* to do is be sunny and happy. Show those pearly whites. Smile, smile, smile!"

Once she dreamed she was a zombie. She moved without thinking, at someone else's command. In her dream, she just walked and walked and walked, like she was one of The Night of the Living – and she wanted to be Dead. That was how she felt now as she listened to the old nurse. She put her plate with the nearly full-eaten English muffin in the sink, willing herself not to vomit as she picked up a white cloth, as she rinsed it, as she began wiping the orange lipstick off the walls. As she scrubbed and scrubbed and scrubbed, she repeated over and over and over again, "I do belong here. I do belong here. I belong, I belong, I belong." Finally, the new nurse came up behind her and touched her on the shoulder. "That's fine Jennifer. That's clean enough now. Everything's clean."

But Jennifer didn't respond. She continued to scrub. She would not turn around. She refused to let this person see her tears, so she just kept wiping and weeping, wiping and weeping.

David Sterns

Girl Last Seen

A girl has gone missing—they're stopping cars and passing the posters out—and all the mothers check their basements as the radio and newspaper ask them to do, and then they fall to their knees, the mothers of all the girls named—any name—who were ever less-than-four-feet tall, about sixty pounds, and fair, like her, or all the colors there are for daughters, of skin and hair.

they drop their eyes and quietly bend their heads for all those moments on all those simple afternoons when they turned aside to do something much less important to them than their daughters were, and each one, weak-kneed on the ground, gives thanks that while her eyes were off her girl, no one else was there just then in the sunny park, or on the sheltered porch or in the shadow of the stairs, who needed to see that girl of hers for just himself.

Florence Sage

The Devil's Seed

He huddles in the closet
 fetal position tucked tight
With a straightened paper clip
 he scars his forearms
 drawing blood.

I take away his weapon
 ask him to return to his seat
he pulls coats from the rack
 to hide under
continuously emitting
 the soft plaintive, pitiful mew
 of a newborn kitten

I send for help
 having twenty-seven others to attend to
 right here, right now
My heart aches
 while I choke on
the lump in my throat
 making it difficult to go on...
but I must

The counselor joins him
 on the closet floor
 pulls the door shut behind her
I hear their muffled voices
 as I try to continue an irrelevant lesson
in social studies.

Slowly he confides
~he's the devil's seed~

He wants to die
His mother says
 he'll always be bad

After a couple agonizing years
 or maybe twenty minutes
 of silent prayer

The counselor emerges
 alone

He wants to stay there, she says,
 until his father promises

Not to drink

Jan Bono

Hitler's Birthday 1999

For some,
not the day
to saw logs in the sun,
to smell Port Orford Cedar
cross cut on the beach,
soft chicken-nest
piling up.
Or, straight cut
sawdust
filling the air
with the warm breath
of old growth
resin.

Not the day for some.
But,
What else is there
to do
When the whole world
is mad?

Reba Owen

Another Night Under the Bed

She woke to the sound of her dad crashing frantically around the house and had barely sat up when he came screaming into her room.

"Quick Jannie, get under the bed! The cops are coming." He turned, ran out and resumed his banging. She yawned, grabbed her blanket and crawled under the bed where she fell promptly back asleep.

She crept out from under the bed the next morning. Her dad was passed out on the couch. She went to the kitchen and fixed herself a bowl of cereal. She sat close to the t.v. so as not to wake him while she watched the morning cartoons.

It was summer, her least favorite time of year. She knew that most of the kids at school looked forward to it but for her it meant never getting away from her father. It wasn't that she didn't love him, after all he was all she had, but a girl of eight got tired of taking care of herself. Jannie's mom had left the year before and though her dad was sure it was just because she was a bitch, Jannie had her own ideas. She turned as her dad rose from the couch and stumbled his way to the bathroom. She continued watching cartoons.

"Bring your daddy his medicine, Pumpkin." He called from the bathroom. She got up, found the bag that he had wedged between the couch cushions the night before and took it to the hand that reached out from the bathroom door. She didn't want to. Dad's medicine always made him irritable and it meant that he would be sitting up all night with the t.v. blaring.

He came from the bathroom with a smile.
"What do ya say about going for a drive?"

"Sure, where are we going?"

"I told you, we're going for a drive."

She knew he was teasing her. One of his favorite games was to make her so mad she was ready to cry. She pulled her coat over her pajamas and put on her sandals. She followed him out to the rusty Ford pickup and waited for him to open the door. The passenger door had to be opened from the inside after her dad had broken the handle trying to drag her mother out of the truck. Jannie hated that truck but her dad always seemed to be much more mellow when he was out of the house.

They headed out of town toward the mountains, which meant they were probably going to Animal Jim's cabin. Animal was one of her dad's friends and though he was the one who supplied her dad with his medicine he always had candy and some crazy story for her. They arrived there about forty five minutes later and parked the truck off the side of the road. They crossed the swinging bridge that spanned the river and followed the trail up to the cabin.

Animal was sitting on the front porch smoking a pipe. "Well, I'll be damned if it isn't a princess right before my very eyes, and look at that, she brought a beast with her." Jannie smiled.

"Howdy, A.J. You been sittin there since last time we were up?" her dad asked.

"I reckon so. Come on in, I bet someone could use a cup of hot cocoa. He winked at Jannie and led the way into the cabin. They stayed there until it got dark and her dad got drunk at which point he decided it was time to head home.

"Well, A.J. I think we best be takin off. The princess is looking a little tired."

Jannie opened her eyes wide trying to prove that

she wasn't all that tired. She didn't want to leave the calm warmth of the cabin. "But dad, Animal was going to tell me a story about, um, about that time he met a big bear."

"That's right sweetie, I damn near forgot."

Her dad, sensing that he was outnumbered, grabbed a beer and sat back down. A.J. Began his lengthy rendition of how he met a big black bear in the woods and "was damn lucky that bear didn't have a liking for crazy old miners." At some point during the story Jannie fell asleep. Her dad carried her back to the truck and started the drive home. He was drunk. Not that it was unusual, except for tonight he took notice of the fact that his daughter was with him. There was an unsettling thought in the back of his mind that just maybe, he wasn't the best dad he could be. A thought that would be quickly erased as the drugs found their way from his arm to his brain.

Suzan Chamberlain

Arch Portal



LaRee Johnson

Celebrate the One Clear Moment:
Some Call It Zen

All is finally quiet,
The raccoon moves up the backyard tree.
Another massive ship glides up river,
And the infinite dots of stars appear.

All is finally quiet.
The seconds tick off the time.
But, when it is this quiet,
The old clock is a metronome, more
A syncopating rhythm, than a teller of time.

Past midnight now—
The quiet is finally all;
Like a black wave opening up across the ocean's face,
The dark silence of night smiles.

The quiet is now, final.
I can hear inside myself.
That iambic heart of mine
Trying to tell me it's my time.

Within the final silence of my thoughts now –
How long it takes to quiet the clattering mind –
The thoughts of concern, avarice and caution,
Finally drift off, now.
It is all quiet.

If the silence will permit me now,
I can write with a truthful hand
Across this ocean shore,
As the wave of silence bubbles white

Over the wet, hard sand-time.
I write with the ancient stick.
I hold it firmly carving letters in the mud
The sand grains line the letters,
Sculpt the words as I draw them,
Cursive thoughts from my soul.

I work the period required—two to five years—
Then cut out the words, carving each,
Thoughts built up by life's slow grind.
Grains of the bones of friends who have died:
A sparkle of sand from the gleam in her eye,
A ruff edge from a shattered knee,
I run these chunks of life through my mind.

Like sparkling fireworks, the sun glistens on some:
Lost particle of tooth, of toe bone, of friend.
But within the silence I can see them, briefly,
Moving slowly, dissolving and reappearing, brief fire-
works.

I try to reach the eternal:
The meaning within the silence.

So simple: We are each in the wave;
The wave of water and salt.
When we watch in silence our own
current,

This can set us free.

We cannot rescue or separate the self;
It cannot get to dry land.
We have saline blood and body tides,
Inseparable.

If you can see the current's curve,

When the body-mind dilemma drifts away,
This is being free.

Michael Ray Seaman

In Memoriam

*Michael Ray Seaman
(1941–1999)*

*Father, Husband, Businessman,
& Poet*

*Who generously supported the
literary arts
in Clatsop County.*

Millennium Courage

It came without you
It came without my permission
It came in fireworks and confetti and glitz
And in Tears.
The Millennium.

I tried to hold It back
To will It away
To hide from It
To run from It
I won't let It come
Without you.

But the New Year came.
You weren't there-
To hold my hand
To wipe my tears
To help me be strong.

I made the passage alone
Alone with our daughters
Asking why?
Asking how?
Asking for courage.

Y2K was not the cataclysm
The devastation had already come
2000 is just one more awful chore
Without you
This passage of Time
Just another bridge fallen down
Just another link left behind.

I hold our girls
Dry their tears
Search desperately for words
 Black holes! Courage!
 Father/Daughter outings! Courage!
 Damn!

Courage.

Jan Hoffman-Seaman

Memento

A small girl
In a gold dress
White face, winter sun,
A twirling diva dances
At the edge of the ocean.

You can hardly see
Her arms spinning blue
Or her salty legs
Or her seaweed hair
Against the solstice sky.

Balanced like a sextant,
Cold as flight,
Her bare feet chart
A constellation of notes,
The sand her starry night.

Aqua eyes, abalone lips
Pearls on the foam like fire.
You can hear her music
Wings on the waves
Feel her green desire and you

Run to the shoreline
Calling her name.
But she refuses to answer
That fury of tears
Or fear the roar of the titan.

Laura Lattig

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